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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001715

SIPDIS

NOFORN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: DELTA QUIET (FOR NOW)

REF: A. ABUJA 1675

[B](#). ABUJA 1673

[C](#). LAGOS 2034 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge Rick Roberts for Reasons 1.5 (B & D).

[1](#). (S/NF) SUMMARY: Since last week's negotiations in Abuja (Ref A), no major violence has been reported from Rivers state or the Delta region. While one group reportedly "disarmed," another was a no-show. With more talks scheduled to begin October 8, militia leader Asari remains wary of the GON's intentions. Other observers are equally skeptical of the GON's sincerity and the possibility of a resolution to the conflicts rooted in Nigeria's flawed 2003 elections. The absence of a response from the GON brings into question the continued viability of the Nigerian state as currently structured and creates an environment that could encourage more violent opposition to GON policies or create a martyr to the cause of increased autonomy for Nigeria's regions. END SUMMARY.

SITUATION ON THE GROUND

[2](#). (U) Since the negotiations in Abuja that ended on October 2, no major flare-ups of violence have been reported in the oil-rich Delta region, although one helicopter attack on a group of Asari's "commanders" reportedly took place October 1 while Asari was in Abuja. Furious initially, Asari reportedly calmed down and ordered no retaliatory attack by his group. Asari returned to Rivers State midday October 2 and ducked the receiving party at the airport, entering his vehicle and departing for one of his camps. He returned to the town of Buguma, one of his primary headquarters, to triumphant celebrations by hundreds of armed supporters.

[3](#). (SBU) A scheduled militias disarmament meeting took place this week, but Asari's rival Ateke Tom showed up alone and made a show of "disarming" his militia. Asari sent a message instead, that he was still "accepting applications" for membership in his group. (COMMENT: Tom also publicly "disarmed" his militia some weeks ago to much fanfare, but to little military effect if he keeps having arms to turn in. Nobody believed Governor Odili's ally, Tom, was disarmed the first time either. END COMMENT.) At another event scheduled to show the reconciliation between Tom and Asari, Tom was the no-show. Asari took the platform again and called for interested parties to apply for membership in his group.

NEGOTIATIONS

[4](#). (U) Asari has returned to Abuja for the next round of talks with the government, but his statements indicate no intention to disarm his fighters. He says that he thinks the GON is not very sincere, and that there is "every possibility" that disarmament will not go ahead. The Asari-GON negotiations last week covered five of the ten points highlighted in the talks, supposedly agreeing on:

- disbanding of all militias and total disarmament;
- immediate cessation of hostilities by militias and the GON;
- GON commitment to promote the development of the Niger delta;
- a pledge to be peaceful and law abiding; and
- a commitment to the unity of the country.

Outstanding issues include:

- resolution of chieftancy issues in Okrika;
- resolution of chieftancy issues in Kalabari;
- establishment of committees to work for "wholesome community development" in the Delta;
- comprehensive disarmament and observance of fundamental rights; and

-- rehabilitation and re-integration of disarmed youths into "productive and gainful employment."

15. (C) Asari remained in Abuja from September 29 until October 2, sources near him report, but was unable to see President Obasanjo until late October 1 or early October 2. According to one source, Asari refused to meet Obasanjo without his own security men. The source claimed that Asari threatened to walk out if his men, armed with side arms and hand grenades, were not allowed into the meeting. The President reportedly acquiesced. At the end of the meeting, Obasanjo assured Asari of his security, but Asari demanded a "hostage" to travel with him to Port Harcourt. Asari chose Andy Uba, Special Advisor to the President on Domestic Affairs.

QUESTIONS OF CREDIBILITY

16. (C) In addition to Asari's own doubts, other observers remain skeptical. The leader of an Ogoni organization, Ledum Mittee, told PolOff that this first Asari agreement was "worthless" and that he expects more trouble to follow. Other Ijaw leaders criticized Asari, and complained that if Obasanjo wanted to calm the region he would have to make deals with each of them in the same fashion. The leader of the Ijaw Youth Council added a threat to occupy flow stations and "stop production" in conjunction with a labor-led general strike (septel) planned for October 11. From the neighboring South East region, Igbo leader Chukwuemeka Ojukwu compared GON security services "constantly harassing" politicians on one hand, while negotiating with militia leaders like Asari on the other. "Asari kills hundreds of soldiers and damages oil facilities and is treated like royalty," Ojukwu mused, and perhaps "we (the Igbos) need more guns to attack the pipelines" to get Obasanjo's attention.

COMMENT

17. (S/NF) This outbreak of violence -- rooted in GON's flawed election, the disaster of GON environmental, development and political policies in the Delta, and the GON's failure to prevent the corruption-driven growth of militias nationwide -- brings into question the continued viability of the Nigerian state as currently structured. If Obasanjo gives Asari a good deal, it could well encourage other groups with grievances to pursue their claims more forcefully. If the negotiations are used instead as a tactic to buy time until eliminating Asari, it runs the risk creating a martyr to the cause of increased autonomy for the 250 plus tribal and ethnic groups in the country, as well as an environment for further massacres on the level of Odi (2000) or Zaki-Biam (2001).

ROBERTS